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25 November 1977

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LATIN AMERICA WEEKLY REVIEW

25 November 1977

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This publication is prepared for regional specialists in the Washington community by the Latin America Division, Office of Regional and Political Analysis, with occasional contributions from other offices within the National Foreign Assessment Center and from other agencies within the Intelligence Community. Comments and queries are welcome. They should be directed to the authors of the individual articles.

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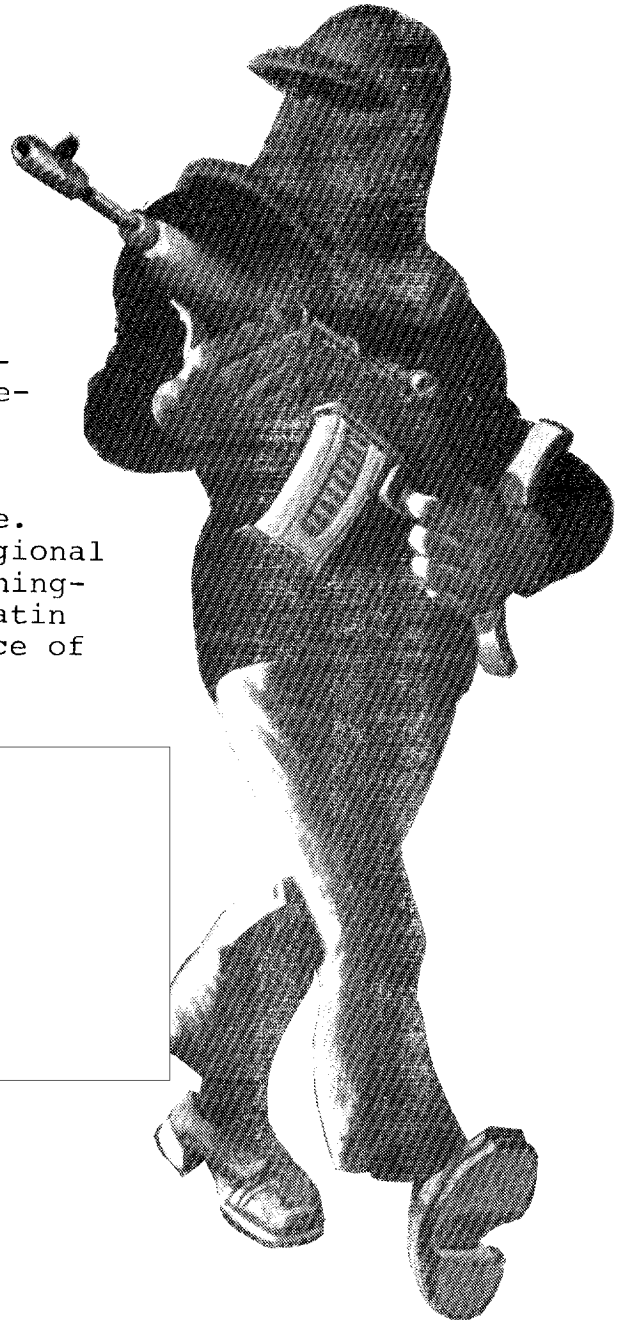

INSURGENCY AND TERRORISM IN LATIN AMERICA

This special edition of the *LATIN AMERICA WEEKLY REVIEW* is devoted entirely to the question of leftist terrorism and insurgency in the hemisphere. It was prepared for regional specialists in the Washington community by the Latin America Division, Office of Regional and Political Analysis.

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Introduction

Historically, Latin American Governments have frequently been troubled by some form of insurgency and terrorism. During the colonial period, there were sporadic Indian uprisings undertaken in the name of human and political rights against the various local governments. Following independence, the factionalism and inherent personalistic approach to government spawned numerous revolts. *Personalismo* and the consequent authoritarianism of the regimes excluded many potentially politically active people from the governmental process. This situation was exacerbated by the traditional Latin reluctance to compromise on any issue. Vehement vocal opposition to government policies in many cases became personal vendettas and took the form of armed resistance. As a result, armed struggle became almost a legitimate means to power.

Until recently, the level of opposition to a given government was cyclical in nature: it began at a low level when a new government was formed and intensified the longer that government stayed in power. Following the government's overthrow, the whole process was repeated. Now, however, the various Latin American military governments seem to have broken this pattern by force of arms, made more effective by the overall unity and sense of purpose of the armed forces and the lack of a large, united, and coherent opposition. The success of the military seems, ironically, to have resulted from the increased amount of US assistance to combat insurgency during the 1960s and the decision by Cuba to limit its financing and support of insurgent groups after the defeat of Che Guevara in Bolivia.

Despite the generally low level of insurgency and terrorism in Latin America, there are still groups that can cause problems for or embarrass a number of governments. In addition to the well-publicized violence in Argentina, there has been a marked surge in terrorist activity during the past year in El Salvador and Nicaragua, and an increase in Venezuela that is embarrassing politically to the government there. These activities so far seem to be locally spawned manifestations conducted with little or no foreign assistance. Cuba is continuing to provide limited support to the terrorists,

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but the amount of assistance appears to be negligible compared to Castro's revolutionary offensive of the 1960s.

Meanwhile, the Revolutionary Coordinating Junta (JCR), a group formed in 1974 by revolutionaries from Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguary, has taken up the banner of guerrilla leadership and provides, at least on paper, a unifying element for the Latin American revolutionary movements. Most JCR representatives are based outside of Latin America--principally in Paris--and confine their activities to the publication of propaganda attacks on the military governments. JCR personnel, however, may have been involved in the series of operations against Latin American targets in Europe (including the murder of the Bolivian Ambassador to France) that the Che Guevara International Brigade conducted last year.

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Most of the guerrilla groups seem to have limited contact with the local Communist parties and, except for periodic consultation with JCR activists, appear to be operating at random in their own urban or rural world.

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In contrast to the unruly days of the 1960s, when the guerrillas expected to challenge the various governments for power, most of the insurgent groups have now adopted the more realistic ambition of embarrassing the governments or forming a nucleus around which other disaffected, but nonviolent groups could attach themselves. This policy, for example, is being followed in Nicaragua in an effort to wear down the Somoza government and in Argentina, where the terrorists have long been trying to gain a following from Peronists, Communists, and the labor unions.

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Ironically, the United States' espousal of human rights in Latin America has been coopted by all of the insurgents to show, first, that the existence of guerrillas is an indication that at least a segment of the population does not have human rights and, second, that governments will reply to any opposition with massive retaliation and consequent human rights violations. Government repression of the guerrillas, therefore, has turned into a "damned if they do, damned if they don't" situation.

Insurgency has been present on the Latin American scene for centuries and probably will not go away as long as one violence-prone opposition figure remains. The military governments have been fairly effective in controlling recent outbreaks, but isolated incidents are difficult to prevent. The real danger is that some governments, bedeviled by rampant terrorism, will overreact with massive repression and human rights violations. This would further spur both opposition terrorism and government retaliation--an endless cycle.

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Argentina

In Argentina, the Cubans used their diplomatic presence--at least until mid-1976--to maintain contact with several domestic terrorist groups, as well as representatives of the Chilean MIR. [redacted] 3.3(b)(1)
the Cubans met regularly with representatives of the Argentine People's Army (ERP) and the Montoneros during
3.3(b)(1) 1974-76. [redacted] the Cubans provided funds and propaganda guidance for newspapers published by the Revolutionary Workers' Party, the political arm
3.3(b)(1) of the ERP. [redacted] the Argentine security forces arrested Patricio Biedma, a representative of the Chilean MIR, in August 1976. Biedma reportedly revealed that in addition to the $75,000 given to him, the Cubans had also provided funds to the ERP and to the Montoneros. An ERP member [redacted] 3.3(b)(1)
also in August 1976--confirmed that Cuba had given financial assistance to his group.

The Cubans, however, may have reduced or suspended their contacts with Argentine subversives since mid-1976. The confessions of several arrested terrorists prompted a closer surveillance of Cuban Embassy personnel by the Argentine security forces. In August 1976 two
3.3(b)(1) Cuban Embassy employees were kidnaped and never found. [redacted] the Cubans suspected that they were killed by rightist elements in the Argentine Government. There have been no reports of Cuban involvement with Argentine revolutionaries since September 1976. The Argentine Ambassador was assured earlier this year by Carlos Rafael Rodriguez that Cuba is totally removed from "current guerrilla and terrorist efforts in Argentina."

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ARGENTINA

A year and a half ago, the unfettered activities of terrorist extremists brought Argentina to the brink of anarchy. The inability of former President Peron to control the subversives, as well as the chaotic economic situation, prompted the military takeover in March 1976. The armed forces so far have inflicted serious losses on the terrorists, but no Argentine official believes the war against leftist subversion is over.

The Peoples' Revolutionary Army (ERP), once the most effective terrorist organization in Argentina, has been all but destroyed. Its membership has been reduced to 100 activists. The urban-based Montonero organization has also been seriously hurt by the government's counter-terrorist campaign--only about 800 members remain--but it retains the ability to carry out small-scale operations.

The Montoneros group was formed in 1970 as a Peronist organization with a membership mainly of students, professionals and, to a limited extent, workers. The ideology of the Montoneros has tilted gradually to the left. The group now considers it is engaged in a "popular war" against "the forces of repression and imperialism."

Most of the top leaders of both the ERP and the Montoneros have been killed, captured, or forced to leave the country. The loss of leaders and increased official countersubversive activity directed at eliminating the Montoneros' ability to work in joint and coordinated operations have resulted in major organizational changes.

The group has moved away from its past elitist policies and is now trying to exert influence at the grass-roots level, particularly among the workers. In this way, the terrorists hope to take advantage of labor restiveness over the government's economic policies. The Montoneros are trying to take credit for any improvement offered by the government to the workers. Labor traditionally has been unwilling to cooperate with the terrorists. Moreover, the current labor difficulties in Argentina probably have little to do with the Montoneros. Unless worker unrest subsides, however, the terrorists could enjoy more fertile recruiting ground and better conditions for expanding their influence within the unions.

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The Montoneros are reportedly operating in small groups of three to four with little coordination. These units have proved effective against government security forces, which find it difficult to detect or infiltrate such operations. A noticeable increase in terrorist activities in Buenos Aires last month indicates that the terrorists' new tactics are working. Several of the violent incidents were directed against businessmen, which suggests that the terrorists are changing their priorities and concentrating their operations against business executives instead of military officials.

Outlook

Despite President Videla's promise of peace by Christmas, the eradication of subversion will probably continue to preoccupy the regime. The combat activities of the Montoneros have been somewhat curbed, but the group's political wing will probably become increasingly active. The Montoneros still enjoy the passive support of thousands of persons who identify with the Peronist left.

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